DECISION RECORD

Reference: Environmental Assessment for Grazing Authorization, #NM-060-99-021

Decision: It is my decision to authorize the issuance of a ten year grazing lease to Danney Salas for the Bureau of Land Management grazing allotment #63069. The lease will authorize 1 cows yearlong at 100% Federal Range from March 1 to the end of February, for 12 Animal Unit Months (AUM's). Any additional mitigation measures identified in the environmental impacts sections of the referenced environmental assessment have been formulated into stipulations, terms and conditions. Any comments made to this proposed action were considered and any necessary changes have been incorporated into the environmental assessment.

If you wish to protest this proposed decision in accordance with 43 CFR 4160.2, you are allowed 15 days to do so in person or in writing to the authorized officer, after the receipt of this decision. Please be specific in your points of protest. In the absence of a protest, this proposed decision will become the final decision of the authorized officer without further notice, in accordance with 43 CFR 4160.3. A period of 30 days following receipt of the final decision, or 30 days after the date the proposed decision becomes final, is provided for filing an appeal and petition for the stay of the decision, for the purpose of a hearing before an Administrative Law Judge (43 CFR 4.470).

The appeal shall be filed with the office of the Field Office Manager, 2909 West Second, Roswell, NM, 88201, and must state clearly and concisely your specific points.

Signed by T. R. Kreager 8/12/99
Assistant Field Manager- Resources Date

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
for
GRAZING AUTHORIZATION

ALLOTMENT 63069

EA-NM-060-99-021

OCTOBER, 1998

U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Roswell Field Office
Roswell, New Mexico

I. Introduction

A. Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action

The grazing regulations allow for a ten-year lease to be issued for grazing outside the grazing district boundary. The Roswell Resource Management Plan/Envirom-nental Impact Statement(RMP/EIS) states a livestock grazing management goal of providing effective and efficient management of allotments to maintain, improve and monitor range conditions. A site specific analysis of the impacts of renewing a grazing lease to the applicant, Danney Salas, is needed for compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and to make an informed decision.

This document will analyze the site specifics of authorizing the renewal of the lease on allotment 63069. This allotment is within the PinionlJuniper vegetative community as identified in the Roswell Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (RMP/EIS). Vegetative communities managed by the Roswell Field Office are identified and explained in the RMP/EIS. Appendix I I of the draft RMP/EIS describes the Desired Plant Community (DPC) concept and identifies the components of each community.

B. Conformance With Land Use Planning

The Roswell Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (October 1997) has been reviewed to determine if the proposed action conforms with the land use plan's Record of Decision. The Roswell Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (RMP/EIS) states a livestock grazing management goal of providing effective and efficient management of allotments to maintain, improve and monitor range conditions. The proposed action is consistent with the RMP/EIS.

C. Relationships to Statutes, Regulations, or Other Plans

The proposed action is consistent with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (43 U.S.C. 1700 et seq.); the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934 (43 U.S.C. 315 et seq.), as amended; the Clean Water Act (CWA)(33 U.S.C. 1251 et seq.), as amended; the Endangered Species Act(16 U.S.C. 1535 et seq.) as amended; and the Public Rangelands Improvement Act of 1978 (43 U.S.C. 1901 et seq.).

II. Proposed Action and Alternatives

A. Proposed Action

The proposed action is to authorize a grazing lease on allotment 63069 for I Animal Unit (AU) year long for 12 animal unit months (AUMs). The lease would be specifically for I cows from March Ist to the end of February (yearlong) for 12 AUMs. The lease would be offered to Danney Salas.

B. No authorization alternative:
This alternative, if selected, would be to not issue a grazing lease for allotment 63069. No grazing would be authorized on the federal land within allotment 63069 under this alternative.

III. Affected Environment

A. General Setting

Allotment 63069 is located in Lincoln County, about 3 miles west of Picacho, New Mexico. The allotment consist of a 40 acre isolated parcel of federal land. The area is grazed by cattle and sheep.

The area of allotment 63069 consists of limestone hills. The elevation is 5500 feet above sea level. Grass understory and shrub species grow in conjunction with the sparse pinion-juniper. The average precipitation for the area is 12 to 16 inches. Most of the annual precipitation falls during high intensity, short duration thunderstorms.

The following resources or values are not present or are not affected: Prime/Unique Farmland, Cultural Resources, Native American Religious Concerns, Wild and Scenic Rivers, Hazardous Wastes, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, and Minority/Low Income populations, Floodplains, and Riparian/Wetlands.

B. Affected Resources

1. Soils - The soils present on allotment 63069 are primarily the Dearna-Rock outcrop association. The soils are very steep, very shallow, shallow, and well drained on hills and breaks. It formed in material derived dominantly from limestone.

2. Vegetation - The ecological (range) site for the area is Limestone Hills CP-4. The primary grasses are hairy grama, muhly, three-awn, and tridents. Shrubs include mountain mahogany, yucca, cactus, and sumac. Forbs of various species occurs when moisture conditions are favorable.

A vegetative study on this allotment which were established in 1991. Analysis of the monitoring data collected from this study indicates that there is sufficient forage produced on the federal land for I AU. The data shows the ecological condition for the area evaluated to be in good condition. Copies of the monitoring data and the analysis of the data are available at the Roswell Field 0 ffi. c e.

3. Wildlife - The area provides habitat for small animals, birds, rodents, and a population of mule deer.

4. Threatened and Endangered Species - The only known threatened or endangered species of plants or animals on allotment 63069 is the bald eagle. A list of federal threatened, endangered and candidate species reviewed for this EA can be found in Appendix I I of the Roswell Approved

RMP (AP 11-2). Of the listed species, avian species such as the bald eagle and peregrine falcon may be observed in the general geographic area during migration or winter months. There are no designated critical habitat areas within the allotment.
5. Livestock Management - The allotment is grazed by sheep and cattle.

6. Visual Resources - The area of Allotment 63069 is located within a Class IV Visual Resource Management (VRM) area. The Class IV rating means that contrasts may attract attention and be a dominant feature in the landscape in terins of scale. However, the changes should repeat the basic elements of the landscape.

7. Water Quality - There is no surface water on the 40 acres of federal land and no wells that tap any ground water. All precipitation that runs off, drains downhill toward the Hondo River.

8. Air Quality - Air quality is good when the wind blows and very good when it doesn't. The area is in a Class 11 area for the prevention of significant deterioration of air as defined in the federal Clean Air Act. Class 11 areas allow a moderate amount of air quality degradation.

9. Recreation - Recreation opportunities are very limited in this grazing allotment because the public has limited legal/physical access to public lands. The parcels of Public lands within this allotment are scattered and are generally surrounded by private lands.

10. Caves and Karst - A complete significant cave or karst inventory has not been completed for the federal lands located in this grazing allotment. Presently, no known significant caves or karst features have been identified within this allotment. This allotment is located within a designated area of Low Karst or Cave Potential.

IV. Environmental Impacts

A. Impacts of the Proposed Action

1. Soils - The soils will be influenced by livestock grazing through hoof action and the removal of standing vegetation. Infiltration rates will be increased by chipping of soil surface over most of the area but will be decreased by compaction around watering, trailing, and bedding areas. The area of compaction would be relatively small. Livestock grazing will remove vegetation that would have reduced the erosive forces of wind, rain, and surface runoff. Proper utilization levels and grazing distribution patterns will retain sufficient vegetative cover so as to maintain the stability of the soils. The level of grazing identified in the proposed action, would continue to maintain an adequate ground cover for protection and development of the soils. The percentage of bare ground and rock found on the allotment fall within the parameters established by the RMP/EIS for this vegetative community.

2. Vegetation - Vegetation grazed by domestic livestock and wildlife is not adversely affected unless the amount of utilization is severe over an extended period of time. Ecological condition as shown by the data collected in 1991 indicates that the vegetation is sustainable at the past and proposed amount of grazing by livestock.

3. Wildlife - Wildlife will continue to compete with domestic livestock for forage and browse. Cover habitat for wildlife will increase as the pinion-juniper increases. Wildlife populations will not be changed significantly by livestock grazing.

4. Threatened & Endangered Species - Livestock grazing, as a result of renewal of the grazing lease, may affect, but not likely adversely affect the bald eagle. It is expected that habitat and range condition would be maintained or improved by authorizing grazing conducive with vegetation production goals. Habitat for wintering bald eagles would not be negatively impacted by livestock grazing. There would be no effect to the peregrine falcon as important riparian habitat or potential nest sites are not found on the allotment. No occupied or historic nesting habitat occurs within the allotment or within 3400 meters (2.1 mi.) of the exterior allotment boundary.

5. Livestock Management - The proposed action would allow the existing livestock management to continue. The existing management is not causing any adverse impacts to the environment. The distribution and supply of livestock water on adjacent land is available for wildlife. Livestock grazing will continue to maintain or increase ground cover by stimulating growth of vegetation and by scattering litter which protects the soil from wind and water erosion.

6. Visual Resources - Visual resources will be managed to meet the Visual Resource Management (VRM) classes. All proposed management activities will be evaluated with regard to visual resource management and those projects that are compatible with the character of the natural landscape will be encouraged. No management actions should be proposed that would degrade visual quality to the extent that a change in any VRM class will result. The continued grazing of livestock would not affect the form or color of the landscape, or the primary aspect of the vegetation within the allotment.

7. Water Quality - Livestock grazing will not have a significant influence on water quality since there is no perennial live water exist. A small amount of sediments increase into the water channels may occur but is related primarily to the intensity and duration of the precipitation occurrence and affected only slightly by livestock grazing activities. The ground water is not affected by livestock grazing.

8. Air Quality - The proposed action will not have an effect on the air quality. The air quality will remain virtually the same as present.

9. Recreation - Grazing would have little or no affect on the recreational opportunities, since the recreating public has no legal or physical access to this parcel of public land. Recreation activities that could occur within this grazing allotment are limited due to land patterns.

10. Caves and Karst - No known significant caves or karst features are known to exist on the public lands located within this allotment. Grazing would not affect these resources.

B. Impacts of the No Livestock Grazing Alternative

1. Soils - The soil will not be subjected to compaction, chipping, and standing vegetation reduction that are associated with livestock grazing. The stability and development of the soil would be about the same as with grazing. Soil compaction would be reduced on the allotment around drinking troughs and along trails.

2. Vegetation - There would be a small change in the types and amounts of vegetation found within the allotment. It is expected that the number of plant species found within the allotment will remain the same. Vegetation will continue to be utilized by wildlife but the removal of the standing vegetation by livestock would be absent, which would result in an increase in the amount of standing vegetation and an increase in the accumulated litter on the ground. The pinion-juniper will increase in density with or without grazing.

3. Wildlife - There would be no competition between livestock and wildlife for forage and cover.

4. Threatened and Endangered Species - There would be no change to the bald eagle or the peregrine falcon habitat if the no grazing alternative was selected.

5. Livestock Management - Under the no grazing alternative there would be no grazing authorized on the federal land in the area of allotment 63069. This would have an adverse economic impact to the livestock operation.

6. Visual Resources - No change in the visual resources; scale, land-form, and color; will occur with the no grazing alternative.

7. Water Quality - A slight reduction of sediment into the water courses could be expected with the no grazing alternative because the removal of standing vegetation will not be occurring to the degree allowed in the proposed action. More standing vegetation will slow runoff during precipitation events which will reduce sediments into runoff. Ground water will not be changed by the no grazing alternative.

8. Air Quality - There would be no change to the in air quality with the no grazing alternative.

9. Recreation - Grazing would have little or no affect on the recreational opportunities, since the recreating public has no legal or physical access to this parcel of public land. Recreation activities that could occur within this grazing allotment are limited due to land patterns.

10. Caves and Karst - No known significant caves or karst features are known to exist on the public lands located within this allotment. Grazing would not affect the karst resources. This allotment is located within a designated area of Low Karst or Cave Potential.

V. Cumulative Impacts

No cumulative impacts to the environment are anticipated by the authorization of grazing as listed in the proposed action or from the no action alternative.

VI. Residual Impacts

No residual impacts are anticipated for the proposed action or the alternative(s).

VII. Mitigating Measures

If new infori-nation surfaces that indicate that livestock grazing is negatively impacting other resources, action will be taken to mitigate those impacts.